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Turning 375

First Parish Church of Duxbury celebrates its history with a walk down memory lane

By Andria Farrell
ANFARREL@CNC.COM

The distance between Duxbury and Plymouth is not that far, a mere 15 to 20 minute car ride depending on where you are going. However, imagine having to make that trek every Sunday on foot to get to church. Before the First Parish Church in Duxbury was built in 1632, that is what most people did in the winter when the bay was impassable by boat.

John and Pricilla Alden, and Miles Standish and his family, left Plymouth, in 1628, to start a new community up the way in Duxbury. Rev. Catherine Cullen of the First Parish Church said their breaking off from the Plymouth congregation and forming a new parish in Duxbury was a courageous act, especially after enduring the hardship of leaving their homeland for a new start.

"It is a very exiting time for us, a time when we've really come to fully appreciate our historical beginnings and our ancestors. I have been very mindful of the small group of folks who were coura-

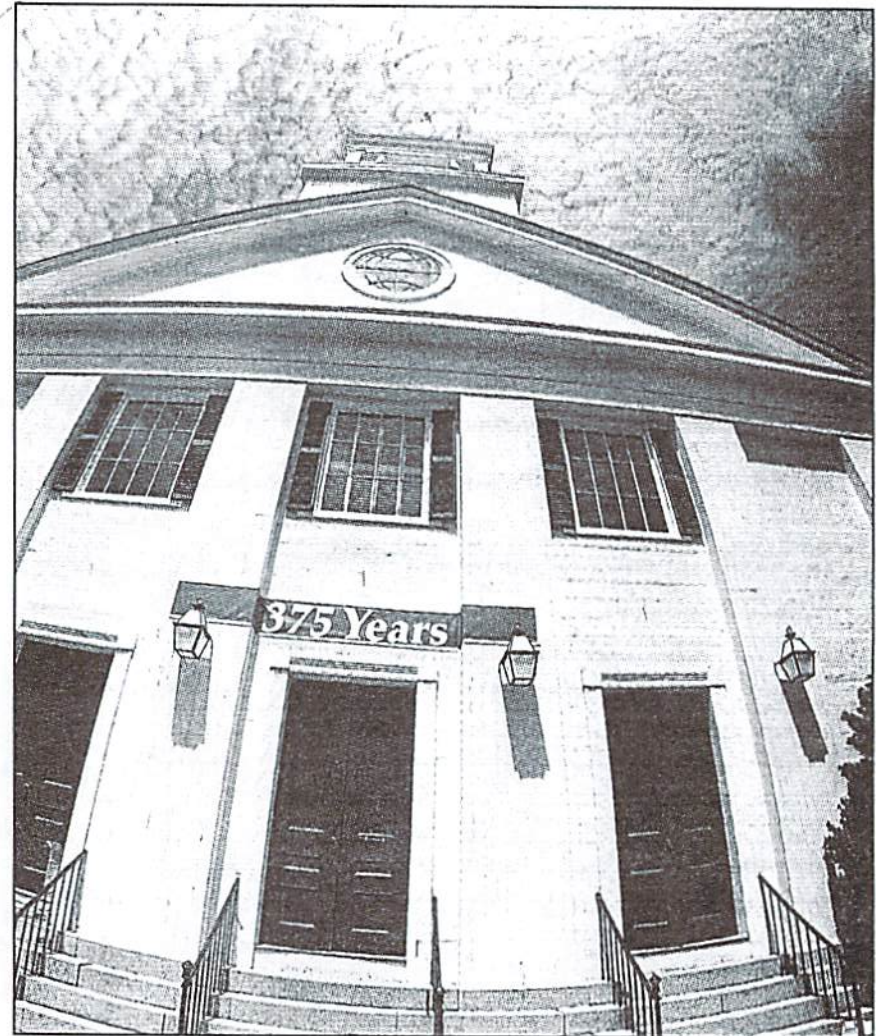
geous enough to break away from the church in Plymouth and create a new gathered community in Duxbury," Cullen said. "It has been very important thinking about those ancestors and what that must have been like, only being here for a short time, coming from England to Holland to America, and having the courage to break away again and start a new place, not across the ocean, but across the bay."

In 1632, the small community in Duxbury asked Elder Brewster if they could be released from the Plymouth congregation to form their own church in their new settlement of Duxbury. The release was granted and 375 years later, this Sunday, the Unitarian Universalist church will celebrate their release.

The original church was located near Halls Corner, before the second building was erected at the spot where the present church stands today next to Town Hall, as the oldest and most historic present day meetinghouse. The church that stands on Tremont Street today is the fourth structure, built in 1840, and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

As part of the anniversary celebration, the Rev. Peter Gomes will give the sermon, he also was the guest preacher at the 350th anniversary celebration. Gomes is the chaplain of Harvard University's Memorial Church and a past president of

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STAFF PHOTO/MARK GARDNER

First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church celebrates its 375th Anniversary this year.

First Parish celebrates birthday

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The Pilgrim Society of Plymouth. Since 1974, he has served as Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard, as well as being the Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church. He is the author of five books, including "The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart," and has been awarded 36 honorary degrees.

Gomes has a close relationship with Duxbury, as a native of Plymouth he was ordained as a minister by The First Baptist Church of Plymouth. His sermon for Sunday is titled "Across the Bay: A View From the Other Side." "It means a lot to them, and to me, to have a native give the sermon," Gomes said.

Gomes said this celebration is a remarkable thing, since the congregation has survived for such a long period of time, and it was the first to leave the arms of the mother church of Plymouth. In his sermon he will discuss the meaning of being an old church and the achievement of separating from the original church and beginning a new congregation.

"I suppose this reminds us that religious impulse is a permanent thing, ironical the only thing that really survives around these days in the same form are the churches, this parish is a living link to its earliest days, but church, is the link from 17th century to the 21st century," Gomes said.

Troy Riley, who has been a member of First Parish for 18 years, said she is astonished to be a part of a congregation that has such an important place in New England history. "When I stop and think that Elder Brewster, John and Pricilla Alden, who are

in every history book, were the founders of my church, it blows me away," she said.

The church not only serves Duxbury. Only 50 percent of the congregation are Duxbury residents, with 40 percent of the congregation coming from Marshfield, and remainder coming from Pembroke, Plymouth, Kingston and various other communities. The First Parish Church of Duxbury has seen 32 ministers,

The symbolic journey and ceremony

The ceremony and celebration on Oct. 14 will begin at the First Parish Church in Plymouth's Town Square at 10 a.m. About 40 Duxbury members will be ceremonially blessed and released from the church to begin a reenactment of the trek from Plymouth to Duxbury. Led by Rev. Catherine Cullen, the migration will begin at approximately 10:30 a.m., with many members dressed in traditional period costume, walking up route 3A towards the First Parish Church on Route 106 in Kingston. They will arrive there at 12:30 p.m., where they will be greeted by the Kingston congregation and served lunch. From there additional members of the Kingston and Duxbury congregations will join the group and head towards Duxbury continuing along Route 3A. The group will travel to Halls Corner via Bay Road to gather at the Miles Standish burial site on Chestnut Street, around 3 p.m., where they will place a ceremonial wreath to mark the first meetinghouse. At this point, families from the congregation will join the group to

and Rev. Cullen became the first female minister in the congregation, yet another historical significant feat.

"The world is very different, but people who come together in religious community is for the same reason we come together, for strength and to learn from each other, the same as they did back in 1632 - it is different, but the same," Cullen said.

make the final trek from Halls Corner to the First Parish Church on Tremont Street for the service delivered by guest preacher Rev. Peter Gomes.

Also as part of its 375th anniversary celebration, First Parish Church will present a special all-Bach concert on Oct. 21, featuring performers from Boston, New York and Philadelphia. The concert will feature First Parish Church music director Edwin Swanborn as harpsichordist and will include solo flute, violin and cello players with a string ensemble. Flutist Robert Stallman, one of the most popular guest artists from the church's Candlelight Concert Series of 1977-1990, will return to play his own transcription of Bach's "Italian" Concerto. The climax of the concert will be a performance of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5.

Tickets for the concert will be \$20, \$15 for students and seniors, and will be available at the door, or by advance sale at the church office. For advance reservations, phone 781-934-2425. For more information, phone the church office at 781-934-6532 or visit the Web site www.duxburyuu.org.